

Voices and Visions from the South Enliven TV

War and famine continue to be the dominant images of the developing world. These images come mostly from Western television. A new series of documentaries, currently being shown on British Television, challenges these stereotypes. The South, a series of 25 programmes from 18 countries gives the filmmakers from the South the chance to tell their own stories.

Daya Kishan Thussu writes from London



Scene from Memories of Old Manila. A revealing odyssey into four centuries of Manila's history, culture and society. To be shown on British television as part of South a series of 25 programmes from 18 developing countries

It is rare to see on Western television screens a programme made by a filmmaker from the developing world. News from the South is usually filed by the Western media's own foreign correspondents. It does not seem to matter that many of these journalists may not know the language, culture or tradition of the country they are covering. As a result, the diversity of 100 or more countries is muffled under the blanket term 'the Third World'.

In a move to break away from Western views of developing countries, one British television channel is screening a series of programmes on the South made by local film makers. Called South, the series opened in February on Channel 4, one of Britain's two independent TV networks. It follows a critically acclaimed broadcast of the same name aired in 1991.

Channel 4, ten years old last November, has established a reputation for innovative television. It has encouraged all sections of the community to have a voice in television, producing programmes about women, ethnic minorities, environment and development and opening up television to independent producers and new ideas.

In news and current affairs, too, it has impressive credentials. Its flagship, Channel 4 News, the nightly 50-minute slot for news and analysis, is probably the most comprehensive daily news bulletin on British television. Channel 4 documentaries, notably Dispatches, have many committed viewers.

South, to be broadcast over the next two months, consists of 25 programmes from 18 developing countries. It is unique. The programmes, most of them 25 minutes long, are made entirely by film and television people from the developing world, giving Southern voices and visions direct access to Northern television screens.

However, increasing dependence on fought-over advertising revenue means that the series, which runs a total of 11 hours, is now being broadcast weekly on Mondays at 11 pm instead of the previous prime time slot of 7 pm, now dominated by popular American comedy.

Two films about China launched the series. The first, *The Hidden Agenda*, examined the emerging alliance between China's communist leaders and Hong Kong's business tycoons, which has made China the

biggest investor in Hong Kong and fuelled the economic boom on the mainland. *The Hare and the Tortoise*, by Chinese filmmaker Yang Shu, a graduate of the Beijing Film Academy, used the stories of two musicians to dramatise the way capitalism is transforming the fabric of Chinese society. The slogan 'serving the people' has been replaced by the unbridled pursuit of money. The film poignantly conveys the struggle of the two musicians to adapt to the new consumer culture, and the problems of an ancient and sophisticated civilisation coming to terms with materialism.

Shu's film portrays Beijing violinist, Li Nan, and traditional musician Ding Hual Cheng, who have for years belonged to the state-run cultural world. Now, to their dismay,

they find that their music no longer has an audience. To survive they have to compete with pop songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan and the latest recordings of Madonna and Michael Jackson from America. The musicians are forced to sell their talents in the marketplace. Li now plays 'classic pop' in hotels and records film music while Ding earns his living playing at wedding and funeral music in villages. He is still committed, however, to collecting ancient folk melodies that are in danger of disappearing, while wearing a McDonald's T-shirt.

Given the wide variety of source countries, the series naturally encompasses a huge range of styles and subject matter. In the programme, *Turning Swords into*

Ploughshares, South African film maker Rapiete Montsho examines two opposing military traditions: the South African Army, defenders of apartheid, and the guerrilla wing of the African National Congress (ANC). The film explores whether a combined army is possible in a transitional South Africa, and whether an integrated force could serve under a black majority government.

From India comes a documentary by Lalit Vachani, *The Boy in the Branch*, about growing Hindu militancy. The programme focuses on the revivalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh which was banned last December following its alleged role in the destruction of a medieval mosque in Ayodhya in northern India.

The Muslim world is represented by *Jamila's Mirror*, an examination of the political and personal life of Arab women by Egyptian director Arabia Lofli.

Out of many entries from Latin America is *Latin Women Beat in California* by Chilean director Valeria Sarmiento, dealing with the issue of illegal immigration. The film portrays Latin women who leave their countries to seek a better life in the United States.

According to the series' producers the programmes provide 'new insight into history, politics, gender issues and beliefs in society which are relevant to understanding the concerns of today.' All the films were commissioned by Channel 4 and, apart from the British broadcasts, they hope to sell to a wider audience overseas. Already the series has been bought by broadcasters in Spain, Portugal, Finland, France, Germany, Israel and Australia.

Is there not a danger that South's producers may be making films with a primarily Western audience in mind, feeding on Western stereotypes about the Third World, its exotic and interesting people and eulogising their struggles?

Those involved with the series at Channel 4 say they are aware of the problem and have ensured that the directors have a free hand in making their programmes.

Said Ruhul Amin, whose film *The Movie Wallah*, about the tribulations of a rickshaw-puller in Bangladesh is also included in the series: 'I am aware of that danger. For me the most important thing is that I have to be true to my medium and do justice to my subject.'

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Volunteers Look to the Future

by Kofi Akumanyi

BRITAIN'S leading volunteer-sending charity, the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), which is in the forefront of working with local people to develop skills in overseas countries, has launched a new plan designed to raise more awareness and broaden its influence worldwide.

For 34 years, volunteers whose average age is 33, having been going out to spend two years in far-flung corners of the earth to help bridge the skills shortage gap in a variety of areas including education, rural development, management, finance, health and the establishment of essential services.

Their contributions are particularly appreciated during emergencies such as wars, drought, famine and floods. Clearly, if the VSO's commendable activities are to continue benefiting poor in developing countries in the 1990s, then new strategies are needed to tackle the fast-expanding demands on the agency's limited resources.

Extensive Review
It is against this backdrop that the organisation launched its new five-year plan, 'Investing in People', in London in September. It contained the most extensive review ever to be taken since the charity was first established as an agency specialising in broadening the horizon of school-leavers by sending them to spend a year in developing countries.

Over the next five years the programme aims to increase its activities to cover 50% of the world's poorest countries — an increase of 10% — and treble the number of returned volunteers actively supporting VSO work on a regular basis.

It also envisages offering overseas partners a wider range of services, in addition to its established and successful two-year volunteer programme to include shorter-term experienced volunteers, training opportunities and project funds.

British pop star David Essex

— the second celebrity to become a VSO Ambassador after photographer Patrick Lichfield — has been working with British volunteers in Zimbabwe, Uganda and the Caribbean and was full praise for their selflessness.

Teaching Projects
Handing over the end-of-service baton to the third Ambassador, former British women's javelin champion Fatima Whitbread, David commented: 'As I prepare to undertake my own music teaching project in Uganda, I am sure that when I return I will echo the words of a volunteer in Zimbabwe — I came to teach but I've learned so much.'

His sentiment epitomises the whole experience and motivation of nearly 19,000 past volunteers who worked for the Service and the 1580 (48% of them female) now actively serving in 50 countries in Africa, Asia, Caribbean and the Pacific regions. Considering the fact that it now costs £10,500 per head annually to send these often highly skilled personnel overseas, fundraising is an important element of the charity's work.

VSO director David Green, who devised the five-year plan, explained that there was a need for flexibility in the services offered and that the plan required a significant increase in real income. 'We shall also attempt to broaden our sphere of influence and raise awareness of our activities — leading, we hope, to a much needed boost to fundraising,' he added.

The popularity of the organisation is unquestionable. In 1991-92 period, it received 75,000 enquiries of whom 8,000 formally applied, 2,000 were interviewed and 1,200 selected. The VSO's activities in 1992-93 cost £18.5 million, £14.3 million of which came from the British gov-

ernment's Overseas Development Administration (ODA).

Local Rates
High remuneration is clearly not what volunteers look for because their stipend is in keeping with the local rates of pay and they often have to work from accommodation without basic necessities. David Essex confirmed this view by commenting that volunteers now in Zimbabwe, where children in the rural areas are facing starvation, have donated their allowances to help feed them.

The image of the VSO participants reflects a common trait in Britons generally, who have a strong preference for voluntary work, an activity embracing over 23 million adults every year. This figure reveals a higher proportion of the population than volunteered ten years ago, according to a national survey conducted by the London-based charity Volunteer Centre last year.

It also showed that in any one week, as many as 10 million adults may be involved in organised charitable activity of one sort or another. Other highlights of the survey indicate that about 53% of charity workers are women compared to 50% who are men; six out of ten people aged from 25 to 44 are currently volunteers, compared to only three out of ten aged 65 or over.

Younger People
This high sense of humanitarianism and interest in

helping developing countries, especially in younger people, has been fostered by the activities of the Independent Centre for World Development Education (ICWDE) which celebrated its 25th anniversary last year.

One of the aims of the centre, whose patron is Queen Elizabeth II, is to educate British people, starting with schoolchildren, about why development aid is necessary. The inclusion of questions on world development issues in school-leavers' examination papers and the addition of geography as a compulsory national curriculum subject from September this year are part of the ICWDE's successful campaign.

Other successful British volunteer recruitment agencies supported by the ODA include the Catholic Institute of International Relations (CIIR), Skillshare Africa (formerly International Voluntary Service) and the United Nations Association International Service (UNAIS).

Dr Laurence Fleming wrote in 'The Sunday Times' in 1958, when proposing the setting up of the VSO, that it would provide 'opportunities of service that would not only make a positive contribution to those countries but would constitute an experience of inestimable benefit to many of our young people.'

That the objective has been achieved cannot be gainsaid. The next step is to continue expanding into the next century.

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Human Impulse at Play

by Sanchita Chowdhury

ALL animals play. Yet man carries its youthful capacity for play with no thought of immediate gain but only for exciting pleasure and joyous rapture. 'Man is the only truly man when he is playing,' said Friedrich Von Schiller. Biologists and ethnologists have said that a game is closely bound up with the urge to explore and to satisfy one's curiosity in a pragmatic media of learning and discovery of inner beings of man and all the higher species of animals.

What is true in biology is also true in various science and humanity studies. Myths, social rituals, and even science, are not based on what I believe is seriousness, but on play, curiosity and gratuitous exploration — factors that stimulate creativity and invention. Many researches of modern science inform the up-to-date man that the flourishing of modern technology is the outcome of man's youthful vigour and creativity.

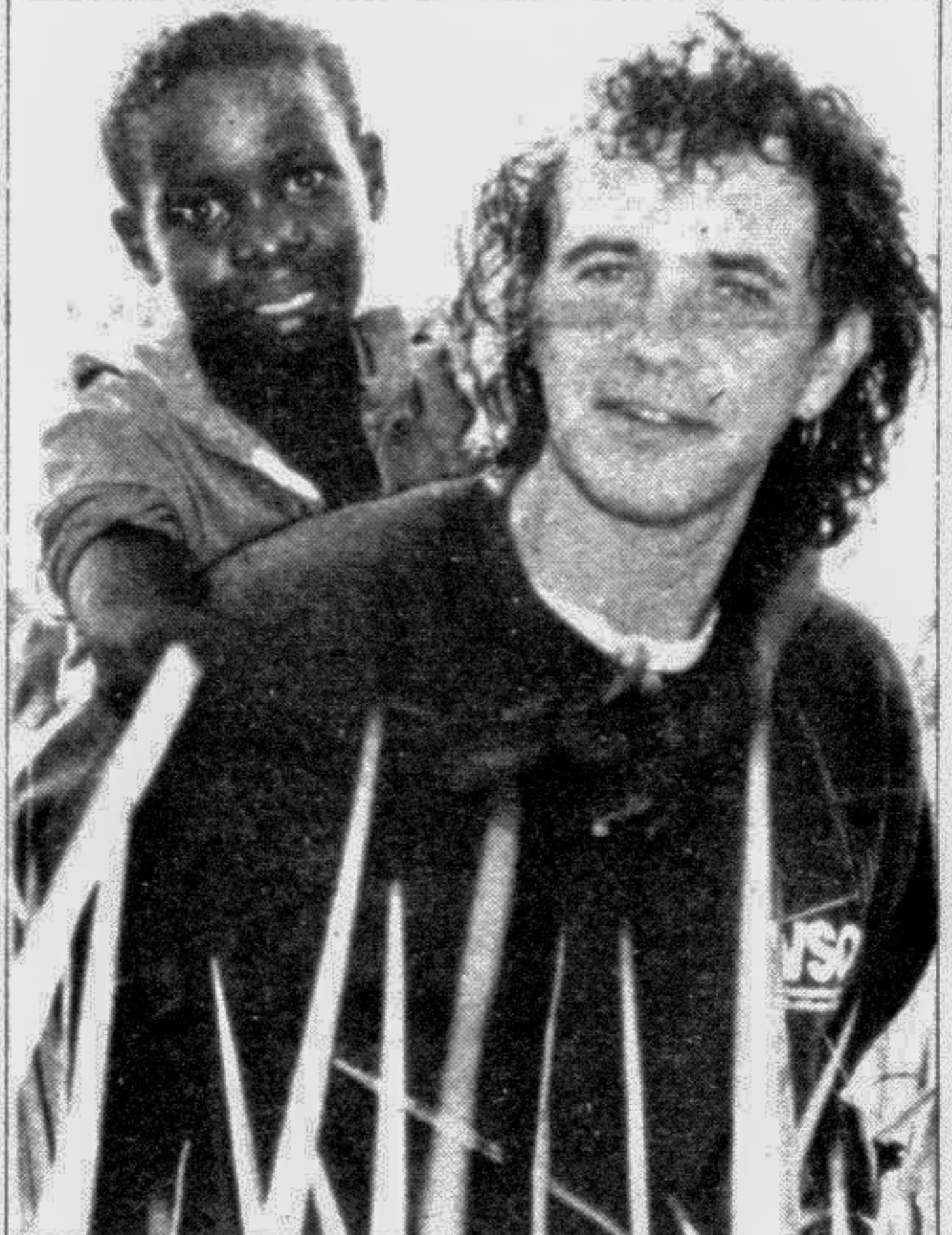
We are not of course talking about games as golf or football. The question is largely about semantic. English language uses words 'games' and 'play' to denote the concept in French, German, Spanish and many other language, designated by the single word 'jeu'. This leads to endless confusions. Even one of the brightest scientists, Darwin, whose 'theory of evolution' created a tremendous revolution in science, has described how, at the moment of discovery, man felt pleasure, and the same excitement that a child feels while playing.

The excitement of games is a living pastime for the past and present moment. In other words, 'play' is a pure aptitude for living, not of this or that type of life, made desirable by fashion or habit but for things as they are, life is as it is.

'I don't think they play at all. They fairly quarrel so dreadfully one cannot hear oneself speak and they don't seem to have any rules in particular; at least if there is nobody attending to them...'

The speaker is Alice, the heroine of Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland,' and she was talking about her confusion at a game in which moral rules have been abandoned. The croquet ground is not the usual smooth lawn but a waste land of ridges and furrow. The hoops, balls, mallets are all living creatures. They literally refused to play the game. A blood thirsty and tyrannical 'Queen' ruled the proceedings by whim, and decided when the play should start and finish. Ultimately the players were cut off on the slightest pretext, Carroll's parody fruitfully illustrated the link of it with game. Alice's experience in the croquet game effectively laid bare the irrational and sometimes dangerous mechanism of social life. The crazy hoops, balls, mallets were simply a parody of bureaucrats, when they impede decisions on projects undertaken in the public interest.

In this particular dilemma of modern civilization, fresher social orders are to be established. And then new games with new norms may appear to the next generation.



Pop star David Essex, outgoing Ambassador for Voluntary Service Overseas, pictured in Uganda.

The Aging Society of Muang Phon

by Arjuna

RED and salty, the infernal earth baked under the harsh sun when I visited this village tucked in what has been described as Thailand's 'bleakest' region.

Rice and jute are the main crops of Muang Phon, a village in Khon Kaen province near Thailand's northern border with Laos. Among its most precious resources are its elders.

As in many Asian countries, the number of Thailand's elderly is rising. It has doubled, in fact, in the last 20 years, the growth rate faster than the rate of Thailand's population increase. In Muang Phon, they also age — but in style, and with purpose.

In the mid-1980s, some village elders complained about

muscular and intestinal problems brought about by frequent sitting or kneeling at the local Buddhist temple during meditation. They consulted Dr Krasae Chanawongse, himself a most unique man, who then organised the Aging Society of Muang Phon.

The Society — whose 175 members are aged 45 to 80 years — began a series of exercises using Singaporean acrobatics and Chinese Tai Chi. Over the years, their health improved.

At about the same time, Dr Krasae also recognised the potentials of the elderly. 'Studies have shown that community health workers who are more than 50 years old are exceedingly effective in

promoting health care,' he said during my visit. 'The challenge is how to harness the aging population productively.'

Dr Krasae, with a small grant from the Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Foundation, launched a health project aimed at increasing community self-reliance in planning and implementing health care. It started with 30 members of the Aging Society of Muang Phon.

Today, these elders lead the Society through exercise regimens and other community activities. More members have applied to become health educators. They are trained at Khon Khaen University's Research and Development Institute headed by Dr Krasae.

They also attend seminars in health institutions like the World Health Organisation's Otological (concerning the ear) Centre. Visiting nurses and doctors from Asian and African countries have also given lectures.

Several of the elders are now doing volunteer work with the district Phon Hospital. Members of the Aging Society of Muang Phon have been invited to train other elderly Thais in Pitsanulok and Chiang Mai provinces in the north and in Buriran, Surin and Ubon provinces in the northeast. Similar aging societies have been formed in these provinces.

Dr Krasae is no ordinary doctor. In 1973 he was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award (Asia's equivalent to the Nobel prize and named after a populist Philippine president) for demonstrating that a doctor dedicated to service can overcome the most stubborn of obstacles in bringing effective health services to neglected and impoverished rural peo-

ple. (The award qualified him to get a small grant which launched the aging society.)

Classmates and relatives never expected to see Dr Krasae again — at least, not to live and practise medicine in the village where he was born. One of eight children in a poor family, he left school at age 13. He was an apprentice in a lumber shop without pay. He earned cash after hours by selling rainwater to thirsty passengers at a nearby railway station.

He was befriended by a school principal and later competed secondary school. A local member of parliament allowed him to live in his house and Dr Krasae continued his studies in Bangkok. He graduated in 1960, at the age of 26.

'In medical school,' his award citation reads, 'thinking of 140,000 people in Phon district with endemic illnesses, treatable diseases and infections, and no doctor, he determined to serve them.'

And serve he did. One of the first things he did was to persuade the locals to contribute one baht (then about 5 US cents) to construct a new clinic. Today, it is a first class health centre, with a small hospital and modern facilities. Unpaid volunteers enlist for training and regular service, preparing patients for examination and other non-medical work.

And now, the Aging Society of Muang Phon. Indeed, Dr Krasae has shown a remote community what it could do for itself given the meagre means.

The elderly have stood up to the challenge. And, like Dr Krasae, delivered.

— Depthnews Asia



ON BOARD A LAUNCH. Sketch by Jeremy Trayner

WRITE TO MITA

Success of Marriage

LATELY I have received letters from a number of young couples, those who are newly married or who are about to be married. They ask for advice on how to make a success of their marriage. I have also heard some complaints from such couples who say that my advice is always directed towards people who have been married for a long time. Therefore my column today is in response to those queries.

First, I will have to say that there is no ready-made formula which will assure the success of a marriage. If it were that easy, then there would be far less disillusionment with marriage. Second, marriage is essentially what you make of it. I know this sounds very boring but it is the truth. If there is love, respect, understanding and a certain amount of humility among couples then there is no reason why a marriage should not be successful.

If the above sounds too simplistic then I shall elaborate it a little.

LOVE: Someone once told me that what is marriage — after all, a monotonous, boring existence, full of responsibilities, bouncing cheque books and dirty dishes, but for the magic called love. Love is the only thing that makes it worth it. Love is the ecstatic, euphoric feeling which makes your heart soar, and touch the stars. It is that magical feeling of wanting to give and asking for nothing in return.

love most makes. RESPECT: I had written a piece on respecting your partner, a few weeks ago. Respecting each other always gives a positive feedback. It brings out the best in each other. Always remember, there are good and bad sides to everyone. The challenge is to discover the positive personality traits in your partner and build on that. It enhances each other's self-esteem and makes you want to be worthy of the relationship. At all cost, please avoid those unintentional but cruel remarks about each other. Believe me, they do nothing for the relationship, on the other hand, they leave you feeling small, worthless and unimportant.

UNDERSTANDING: I am sure I do not have to state how important it is to be understanding and tolerant in a marriage. When two people live together in such close proximity, there is bound to be some tensions, some incidents that go totally against the sensibility of one of the partners. If one can just manage to stay calm at that moment and delay the reaction for the time being, then a major conflict can be avoided. Another very important thing to remember is to wait to say the right thing at the right time. Choosing the right time to vent your complaints or disagreement is a very wise and clever strategy. Couples often say things they don't really mean and regret it later on. Many serious and conflicting situations can be avoided if one of the couple can just swallow her/his pride or anger at that crucial moment.

I must confess that these are not very easy suggestions to follow. I do not also claim to have a prescription for a happy marriage. These are just insights I have gathered over the years during my work as a marriage counsellor. I do realize that each marriage is unique and therefore different. But there are certain behaviour patterns, and certain conflicting situations that are common in most marriages. It is in view of those commonality that I have dared to make the above generalizations.

— Shaheen Anam